Intangible Cultural Heritage Update

News and updates on Newfoundland and Labrador's Intangible Cultural Heritage Program

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In this issue



Inventory of sound and video recordings in Newfoundland and Labrador

Are you part of a local archive or museum that has a box of old tape recordings of community stories hidden away under someone's desk? If you do, we want to know about it!

As a part of this year's work plan, the documentation and inventory committee of the Heritage Foundation's Intangible Cultural Heritage division is trying to find out what sound and video materials are out in the community. We are attempting to discover the extent of existing sound and video collections in Newfoundland and Labrador related to oral history, folklore and intangible cultural heritage.

HFNL is beginning with collections of recordings held by heritage organizations. Information collected in this survey will be used to help determine the scope and condition of sound and video holdings in Newfoundland and Labrador archives, museums and community collections.

Local organizations can take the survey online, using SurveyMonkey, an easy-to-use online questionnaire. You can find the survey at:

http://tinyurl.com/ICHrecordings

If you are working for an archive in the province that is a member of the Association of Newfoundland and Labrador Archives, you may soon get a phone call from someone who will ask you some questions about your holdings along these lines. Once we know what's out there, we can explore further actions towards preserving it and making it accessible!

With Every Cup of Tea, There is a Story to Tell...



SmartLabrador is currently working with partners in the Labrador Straits to amalgamate tourism and IT development for the collection and sharing of local stories about Labrador lifestyle. Through a project, entitled the Coastal Heritage Experience project, SmartLabrador is employing a small team of local residents to:

- collect traditional knowledge
- develop a collaborative tool for building and maintaining digital collections of heritage-related information
- work with local tourism operators in using heritage collections to build new tourism experiences.

This initiative is playing a key role in increasing local capacity for creation of new economic initiatives in the heritage tourism sector. Six operators have developed new experiences that are being launched during the 2009 tourism season. Like traditional rural entertainment, many of the new experiences are based on or at least include storytelling about the lifestyle and traditions of the Labrador Straits region. For people looking for a taste of Labrador lifestyle, these experiences provide excellent opportunities to meet local storytellers, walk through the lives of local legends and try local traditions.

In Memoriam - Violetta (Letty) Maloney Halpert

By Dr. Diane Tye, Department of Folklore, Memorial

Violetta (Letty) Maloney Halpert graduated with a BA in English from Wilson College and an MA from Indiana University. She completed additional graduate work in Folklore, studying with Stith Thompson and George Herzog. In 1940, it was in a graduate course on the folktale taught by Thompson that she met her future husband, Herbert Halpert.

Letty's capabilities emerged early on. While a graduate student, she worked as Assistant to the Head of Residence under the Dean of Women. Following graduation, during World War II she served as an officer in the United States Navy. After the war, she taught English at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio; Murray State College, Murray, Kentucky and Blackburn College, Carlinville, Illinois. For a year and a half she also worked as a reporter and features writer for the Macoupin County Enquirer, a weekly newspaper in Carlinville

As a folklorist, Letty Halpert's interests are wide ranging. She has published on genres from folk cures, jump rope rhymes, song, and dance, to death beliefs. Throughout the 1950s she also chronicled works in progress for the Journal of American Folklore. After moving to Newfoundland in the early 1960s, her research focused most heavily on folk belief, particularly beliefs surrounding death. A sample of this exhaustive work on deathlore was published in her article, "Death Warnings in Newfoundland Oral Tradition" in Studies in Newfoundland Folklore: Community and Process edited by Gerald Thomas and J.D.A. Widdowson (1991).

With the establishment of Memorial University's Folklore Department in 1968, Letty's expertise was important to the emerging Folklore program. She lectured and taught in areas like traditional belief that filled in important gaps. At the time, however, Memorial had a policy against hiring spouses so, with Herbert Halpert positioned in the English, and then Folklore Department, Letty Halpert necessarily made most of her contributions outside of the classroom. Nonetheless, her efforts were



significant in that they helped form the building blocks on which the Folklore program at Memorial University rests.

Among her most important work was the development of an outstanding folklore library for Memorial University. In 1963 Violetta Halpert joined the Acquisitions Department of Memorial University library, serving as its Head for several years before resigning in 1969. As Head of Acquisitions and later as Collections Specialist, she was largely responsible for developing the library's holdings in several areas that today are considered Memorial's strengths: Folklore, American Literature, Linguistics, Anthropology and Irish Studies.

It is largely due to her efforts, together with those of her husband, that Memorial's folklore collection became the best in Canada. In recent years, Letty has continued to build Memorial's holdings through the donation of the Halperts' personal library, which is perhaps the finest personal folklore library in the world.

As a Research Associate with the Folklore Department, Letty Halpert was instrumental to the founding of the Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive and setting its direction. Even before MUNFLA's establishment in 1968, Letty and Herbert Halpert began to develop and annotate the student materials that form the basis of the archive's collection.

Letty undauntedly took the lead on the cataloging of archival materials and her precision and thoroughness as a cataloguer set the tone for future work. Gerald Thomas and John Widdowson described the importance of Letty's extensive contribution to MUNFLA:

"[Letty and Herbert Halpert] devised and refined a comprehensive classification of genres of folklore....The classification not only contributed to the structure of folklore courses taught at Memorial, but also formed the basis for systems of accessioning and data retrieval in MUNFLA. Indeed, in the early years of the folklore programme at Memorial the Halperts painstakingly and systematically discussed with individual students the materials they had submitted as coursework, adding annotations before assigning the data to the appropriate archive category. The classification has proved invaluable in helping students and other researchers to identify and explore major and minor aspects of their own culture...." (1991:xiv).

Letty was an unfailing support to her husband, Herbert, until his death in 2000. She attended conferences with him, joined him on book buying expeditions, undertook fieldwork research with him, and provided extensive assistance in his research, organization, writing and editing of folklore materials. She was by all accounts her husband's most exacting editor and his greatest encouragement.

Dr. John Widdowson, a long-time colleague and friend of the Halperts, commented that "Theirs was a truly a collaborative academic life." Always present, but rarely in the spotlight, Letty assumed a role similar to the women of Newfoundland folktales who, as Widdowson characterizes it, "stood behind the throne...she was the guiding hand unseen." Dr. Martin Lovelace, a former student of both Herbert and Letty Halpert, reflected, "She knows everything he did and a bit more besides."

In no small part due to the dedication and hard work of Letty Halpert over four decades, Memorial University boasts a world class folklore library and a nationally recognized folklore archives. As the Folklore Department marks its fortieth anniversary, the Folklore Studies Association of Canada celebrated these treasures and with its Marius Barbeau Medal recognized Letty Halpert's unsung work in making them possible.

Letty Halpert passed away 30 May 2009.

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